FORT WAYNE, Ind.--Apr. 3--Knight-Ridder/Tribune Business News First-Tel Inc., a Bluffton, Indiana-based telecommunications company is helping Central and Eastern European countries transition to a more modern telephone system. Company executives recently returned from a U.S. Commerce Department-sponsored trip to the Baltic States and Slovenia

First-Tel designs and engineers telecommunications installations, for everything from a building to a country. The company employs 27 in Bluffton but contracts with about 2,000 specialists around the country.

These nations want to leapfrog outdated telephone systems to 21st-century telecommunications. The Baltic states - Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - are planning to build their systems around cellular telephones, using satellite transmissions. Telecommunications is as important to a nation's infrastructure as transportation systems. Inadequate phone systems make wire transfers with banks in these nations difficult.

First-Tel officials have no firm committments from any of the countries they visited and expressed frustration at the slow pace of decision-making the the formerly communist-dominated republics.

That's all the news we have from abroad, so we'll now move on to items of interest here in Northeast Ohio...

Upcoming events...

If you have a question, comment or suggestion about anything you hear on the Lithuanian Voice, or perhaps something you would like to hear, please drop us a line at 4249 Lambert Road, Cleveland, OH 44121. You may also call us at 382-9268 or send a FAX at 382-4133. We are always on the lookout for people in the Lithuanian Community who are doing something interesting, unusual or exciting. If you know of someone who fits that description, or if you are one of those interesting people, please get in touch with us; we might like to put you on the air.